

Michigan Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence

Statement on Parental Alienation Syndrome

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) has been widely discredited by mental health and legal experts. PAS has been rejected as invalid by scientific authorities. The dominant consensus in the scientific community is that there is no scientific evidence of a clinical "syndrome" concerning "parental alienation."

Leading professional organizations, including: the American Psychiatric Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the American Psychological Association, the Leadership Council on Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence, the National District Attorneys' Association, and the American Prosecutors' Research Association have stated unequivocally in their publications that PAS is neither a scientifically valid nor a professionally recognized psychological syndrome. Leading researchers, including some who treat "alienation" itself as a real problem, concur, "the scientific status of PAS is, to be blunt, nil"

(Emery, Otto, & O'Donohue, 2005, p. 10; see also Gould, 2006; Johnston & Kelly, 2004; Myers, Berliner, Briere, Hendrix, Jenny, and Reid, 2002; Smith and Coukos, 1997; Wood, 1994).

PAS fails to recognize that a child and/or parent may have legitimate reasons for having antipathy toward the other parent; it rejects out of hand the idea that allegations of abuse could be true. According to PAS theory, evidence of animosity toward the other parent is regarded as evidence of PAS. Thus, instead of investigating allegations of abuse, PAS turns suspicion on the motives of those seeking protection through reporting abuse. As a result of this "through-the-looking-glass" thinking, victims subjected to intervention by those who subscribe to PAS theory are re-victimized by individuals and systems charged with providing them safety and justice.

Many abusers invoke Parental Alienation Syndrome in hopes of convincing family courts to ignore abuse. They wrongly claim that a protective parent is behind a child's reports of abuse and aggressively litigate to separate the child from the protective parent, who may very well also be a victim. **When courts award custody or parenting time to the parent to whom the child has an aversion, in many instances, the courts are awarding custody to a violent abuser.** The consequences could be dire. Some children placed in the custody of their abusers have committed suicide; others have run away, and countless others have endured the abuse and are permanently traumatized. In recent years, children placed in custody of their abusers have been coming forward to tell their stories and to warn of the danger surrounding the fictitious syndrome. <http://www.courageouskids.net/>



- The **Presidential Task Force of the American Psychological Association on Violence in the Family** stated as early as 1996 that "[a]lthough there are no data to support the phenomenon called parental alienation syndrome, the term is still used by some evaluators and Courts to discount children's fears in hostile and psychologically abusive situations" (p. 40).
- PAS has been rejected multiple times by the **American Psychiatric Association** as lacking in scientific basis and therefore has never been included in any version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Despite concerted lobbying by proponents, both PAS and "Parental Alienation Disorder" (PAD) were again flatly rejected and not included in the recently released DSM-V (Crary, 2012).
- The **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)**, in published guidelines for custody courts states: "[t]he discredited "diagnosis" of "PAS" (or allegation of "parental alienation"), quite apart from its scientific invalidity, inappropriately asks the court to assume that the children's behaviors and attitudes toward the parent who claims to be "alienated" have no grounding in reality. It also diverts attention away from the behaviors of the abusive parent, who may have directly influenced the children's responses by acting in violent, disrespectful, intimidating, humiliating and/or discrediting ways toward the children themselves, or the children's other parent (Dalton, Drozd, & Wong, 2006, p. 24).
- **Dr. Paul J. Fink**, past President of the **Leadership Council on Child Abuse and Interpersonal Violence**, past President of the **American Psychiatric Association**, and professor of psychiatry at Temple University, described PAS as "junk science" (Talan, 2003)., "Science tells us that the most likely reason that a child becomes estranged from a parent is that parent's own behavior. Labels, such as PAS, serve to deflect attention away from those behaviors."
- The **American Prosecutors' Research Institute** and **National District Attorneys' Association** have also rejected PAS (Ragland & Field, 2003).

